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ABSTRACT

The conspicuous absence of Black professionals at predominantly White colleges has serious consequences for Black students. In the State University of New York system, for example, there are only 262 Blacks in a 9,000 member faculty and the highest percentage of Black professionals are low level administrators. For the few Black faculty on majority campuses, maintaining racial identity is difficult. Yet it is essential, for often only a minority teacher can effectively reach a minority student. Black students at White schools are often less well educated than Black students at Black schools because majority teachers cannot always communicate their knowledge in a manner that is meaningful to minority students. Obviously, too, Whites cannot teach Black awareness and pride. Black professors, on the other hand, often become the unofficial mentors of Black students, but this time-consuming activity does not help them gain tenure. Non-renewal of Black faculty is widespread and is accompanied by a decline in the number of Black Studies programs at predominantly White campuses. Black students at majority schools will only survive in direct ratio to the input and impact of Black faculty and staff. More research is needed to substantiate this claim, and affirmative action for faculty and students must be maintained. More fundamentally, however, Black professionals and parents must be willing to assume the ultimate responsibility for the education of Black children. (KH)

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STATUS OF MINORITY PROFESSIONALS ON MAJORITY CAMPUSES

"Saviors, Victims or Survivors?"

by

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Presented by Sheila J. Nickson
National Association for Equal
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STATUS OF MINORITY PROFESSIONALS ON MAJORITY CAMPUSES
"Saviors, Victims or Survivors?"

My comments on this topic are based on my observations after having spent 17 years in academe on majority campuses, and with the added reinforcement of the data, recently collected through the National Urban League's Tri-State Minority Faculty Project. One fact became apparent during the Tri-State Project. If we wanted a true picture of the black professional presence within these institutions, we had to look beyond faculty positions to have any meaningful numbers to analyze, and/or discuss. Clearly, that in itself, becomes an indication of our presence or lack of same. I will speak to the absence of black faculty and the implications for black students; also point out some of the problems black professionals have on white campuses, the important role they play and the importance of affirmative action concepts in developing and maintaining that presence on majority campuses. I will use the university system I am most familiar with as an example. SUNY is the largest majority university system in the world. Our 64 campuses include university centers, liberal arts colleges, specialized colleges, medical centers and community colleges. We maintain a staff of over 27 thousand employees.

A recent SUNY-wide review of only our state-operated campuses, showed that of the approximately 9 thousand faculty, 759 are minorities and that 759 breaks down into 262 Blacks, 114 Hispanics and 376 Asians/Pacific Islanders and 7 others.

Of the over 3 thousand non-teaching professionals (NTP's), there are 696 minorities; in this category, over 70%, the highest percentage, are black.

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In administration, there are 104 minorities, with Blacks comprising over 80% or the majority of minority administrators. So, it becomes clear that the largest percentage of black professionals are not on faculty lines -- at least within SUNY, and I suspect this is true of most majority institutions.

The highest percentage of our black professionals again are low level administrators; or they are clustered in EOP, HEOP and Black and African Studies Programs - with the latter being slowly, but systematically assimilated and/or eliminated. I would like to get back to that topic a little later, but to follow through on that low percentage of black faculty on these majority campuses, it becomes an issue for us as educators when we recognize the importance of faculty in shaping the minds of our youth. Yes, a black president or dean is important but I would argue that black instructors are more than important -- they are crucial to the educational process and they are in short supppy on majority campuses.

Academia mirrors the larger society and nationally while Blacks have made progress, it has been overwhelmingly, the better-educated, so-called middle class blacks, with little or no improvement for the majority who fall in or below the low income level. We must not forget that 50 to 60% of blacks in this country as opposed to 20 to 30% of whites, fall below the 10 thousand dollar income bracket, and this becomes crucial as we look at the federal cutbacks on social programs.

Some of us are convinced we are engaged in a war and that this nation will sacrifice that 20% to eliminate the 50%. We are all aware that unemployment for blacks is over twice that of whites, and that things are going to get worse before they get better.

Obviously, all blacks, including those of us in majority institutions, have difficult days ahead. We must attempt to maintain those inroads we have made and try to press forward toward increasing our

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numbers, at a time when many of our institutions are decreasing staff positions. No matter how difficult the task, we can not forget the important role we play for students, black and white, and the educational role our very presence offers to our non-black colleagues.

One reality for black faculty on majority campuses is identity. I spent nine years in an academic department before regressing into administration, so I have been on both sides of the fence.

For faculty on these campuses, it can be very lonesome. You are often the only black in your department, possibly in your division. Maintaining your own black identity is difficult but key. It is sometimes easier and more rewarding , in terms of promotion, to fall into the"academic identity" of your department. For example, recently there was an opening within a particular department on one of our campuses with an "MA required, Ph.D. preferred", stipulation. There was a black on the selection committee. One of the two finalists was black. Neither of the finalists was overly impressive, however, both had MA/s and were minimally acceptable. The committee selected the white candidate unamimously. I later spoke to the black faculty member and asked why he had voted for the white candiate. I also asked him if he felt there was a need for more black faculty on campus. He looked rather surprised and said, "Of course there is!- I guess I wasn't thinking. I wish you had talked to me before I voted. I just liked his (the white man's) personality better"....I suspect my colleague had simply regressed into his "academic departmental identity". It is always easier to be "just one of the guys". Standing alone is not always comfortable, popular or rewarding. Educating blacks without educating them as to who and what they are, can be as dangerous or more dangerous than no education at all. This is a major factor for black educators to explore since most blacks are and

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will continue to be educated in predominantly white institutions. It is neither accidental, nor coincidental that Black Colleges have a traditionally higher success rate with black students. Not only are the students being educated in their subject matter, they are also being educated in who and what they are. They develop a pride in their blackness, which is totally absent on majority campuses. They also have the advantage of role models. Some good and some bad, but, role models. It is no accident that the majority of our black leaders are graduates of predominantly black institutions.

While some majority faculty members may have a firm grasp on their subject matter, I question their ability in many cases to adequately translate that information to many of our minority students. They obviously cannot teach or project black awareness and pride. How can one teach what one does not understand? In a nation where productivity and creativity are so highly prized, I never pass up an opportunity to share with black students the fact that they (we) are the greatest product this nation has ever produced. Like a diamond which emerges after years of pressure, black people in this country are as strong, as beautiful and as indestructable! I believe that! They need to know that they are the descendants of survivors. Only the strongest physically survived that first boatride from Africa; and only the strongest, mentally and physically, have survived over 200 years of degradation. But, we did survive! We do survive! We will survive! And somehow this survival message must be passed on to all of the youth, on all of the campuses. I'm convinced, we who are black, and we who are located within those institutions which "happen to be other than black", have a role and a duty and a responsibility to assist in getting that message across.

For that reason, many of us become unofficial mentors of our

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black students. We do this knowing there is little or no reward, since no credit is given toward merit, promotion or tenure for these activities. Instead, we are faced with a revolving door for blacks - who are hired but not tenured. Many campuses even have identifiable black lines. They will always hire blacks on these lines, nonrenew, and hire other blacks, but seldom give them tenure or permanent appointment. We are in an inverse relationship here, as dollars decrease, this unfortunate process will increase.

Working within SUNY's Central Administration a few years ago, we were asked for our minority retrenchment list; and in all honesty, assured them we did not have one. If someone had been wise enough - to ask for our minority nonrenewal list, however, that would have indeed been a different story.

I have often been told you cannot solve the problems of the world, but I have never been told to stop trying. If it's a black problem and you are black, on a predominantly white university, regardless of where you are, or what your official position is, you will be called upon to assist in the resolution of the problem.

You will have an opportunity to serve on Affirmative Action committees or special program committees, but unless you forcefully interject yourself into the mainstream, major institutional committees dealing with policy are not offered to you. (Insert Faculty-Senate story here...)

As I mentioned earlier, the demise of Black Studies is a serious issue. Afro-American and Black Studies courses are crucial on majority campuses. It is important for whites, as well as blacks to understand Black American Culture and Contributions. Sound, and I emphasize Sound Black Studies Courses should be required for all students, regardless of race, who intend to work in a multi-ethnic multi-cultural society.

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How can a teacher, social worker, lawyer, or politician perform their duties adequately without courses in the culture of the people they will be dealing with? This is one of our major problems in education today.

Research shows that the expectation ratio generated by mis-educated white teachers in predominantly black schools generates a preponderance of functionally illiterate black youth who are then punished, not because they were improperly taught, but because they failed to learn.

"Why not bilingual education courses for black youth deprived of an adequate comprehension of the English language in a disfunctional educational system which is more interested in bussing than in the quality of education."

Returning to the subject, however, it is common knowledge that when the majority institutions initiated Black Studies Programs, they were initiated for blacks with no serious commitment to the academic growth of the discipline. Today, Black Studies are on the endangered species list and currently, they can only be found on fewer than 600 of the 2,785 University campuses in this country. While they may be surviving on many of our predominantly black college campuses, they are in dire straights on most SUNY campuses and many other majority institutions, where they are so desperately needed.

I remember reading with some dismay in a Black Enterprise poll, that the majority of blacks still believe the predominately white universities provide a better quality of education. How can we believe this, while voicing at the same time our lack of faith in white teachers who teach black youth? How can we believe this and at the same time voice our dissatisfaction with the quality of public school

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education? How can we believe this and acknowledge that many teachers in the system neglect their responsibility to encourage creativity -- as opposed to conformity? To teach basic skills? To teach why as well as how? Since this is occurring at the elementary and secondary school levels, what in the world makes some of us believe that a white university system is any different -- or any better.

No matter how well meaning the intent of a majority institution may be and on many campuses there is an honest effort to serve all students, it is my belief that black students on predominantly white campuses will survive in a direct ratio to the input and impact of black faculty and staff on those campuses, and it is important to establish statistical studies to substantiate this (or disprove it, if you can). I published an article several years ago on Affirmative Action as a Tool for the Retention of Black Students in which I adapted statistical studies which had been done on the retention of female students and correlated those findings, to show a similar pattern of impact on the retention of black students. I had to use the available statistics which by and large dealt with accessing the problems related to the retention of female students. Where is our research? The reality is, it does not exist in any substantive form.

Affirmative action for faculty as well as students must be maintained. Affirmative action is not perfect, but it is a tool, a tool to be used to achieve that which is essential. If blacks are ever to become visible in more than token numbers on majority campuses, realistic goals and timetables must be established and implemented as mandated. This has never really been possible because there is no accurate national availability data or skills bank for Black Professionals. Until that becomes consistently available, we will always hear -- I'd hire one, if I could find one! Efforts such as those by Ken Tollett

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at Howard University and the studies currently being conducted by the National Urban League must be doubled and quadrupled, IF we are to become the initiators and custodians of our own future, statistical studies and research projects by blacks, about blacks are essential.

In summary, it is my observation that it is and will continue to be just as difficult for blacks to survive and prosper on majority campuses as it is in the larger society. However, we can not dismiss the responsibility for our survival, by placing all of the blame on that larger white society. I would suggest to you that we who are black and we who are educators, hold the future in our hands. As parents and as a people, we have to assume the ultimate responsibility for the education of our children. Let us all commit to ensuring that so important a charge is not taken lightly. Let us, if we do, all commit to the production of a generation of educated, black youth; educated not only in their chosen field of endeavor, but, by whatever means necessary, educated in the strength and beauty of their blackness. If we fulfill that charge, we can be assured not only of our children's future but, the future of black America.